MARCH 2023/ISSUE #3

RICHMOND GARDEN CLUB

Magical March!

"Blossom by blossom, the spring begins..."

- *Algernon Charles Swinburne*

Photo by: Fiona Czeschel

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Message from the Newsletter Team

Lisa Colby
Vice President, RGC

March is that magical month where in spite of the chill and occasional frosts into April, plant world is defiantly unfurling anyway, and starting to chatter. Winter begone, come March 21st!

Forsythia is starting to shine. Early cherry and plum blossoms are opening. Daffodils and crocuses have already joined the snow drops and hellebores of last month. Shoots are pushing through soil. Trees are delicately blushing before leafing out, birds are singing, and the circle of life is starting to twirl its skirts again!

Humans are coming back to life in the RGC garden world too. Pruning, and plant ID workshops are happening in

Paulik Park; seedling growing and logistics planning for the Annual Plant Sale are underway; and our new Photography committee is already on the beat taking photos of emerging botanical life around Richmond. The seasonal beautification preparations for the year-round Steveston Boardwalk planters, the Richmond Hospital Auxiliary Thrift Store Garden, Richmond Cultural Centre Rooftop Garden are also afoot.

So we hope this newsletter update finds you eager and raring to go. Time to get out there...

Happy Reading!

Steveston Boardwalk Planter. Photo by: Fiona Czeschel

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

March 16-19
BC Home and Garden Show
Official BC Home + Garden Show March 16-19, 2023 | Vancouver, BC (bchomeandgardenshow.com)

March 17
St. Patrick's Day!

March 18

Club News Update

Welcome Back Snowbirds!

They're back! Our club President Lynda Pasacreta and husband Dan, were very recently spotted safe and sound back in Richmond after a two month migration to and from Costa Rica. Welcome back, too, to the many other club member snowbirds who took the opportunity for travel and adventure while the gardens slept. We are thrilled to have you all back in your natural habitat, in the gardens of Richmond, in time for us all to start gardening this spring!

Deadline to order hanging baskets for pick-up on Plant Sale Day.

March 22
Next RGC Meeting
Feature Guest Speaker:
- Egan Davis, Managing Director, Richmond Parks;

April 1
The Big Picnic (part of the Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival), 10 am to 4 pm at David Lam Park , 1300 Pacific Boulevard,

April 2
Alpine Garden Club of BC, Spring Plant Show and Sale 11am-3pm Floral Hall, VanDusen Gardens

April 8
Vanc. Dahlia Society Tuber Sale, 10am -3pm Floral Hall, VanDusen Gardens

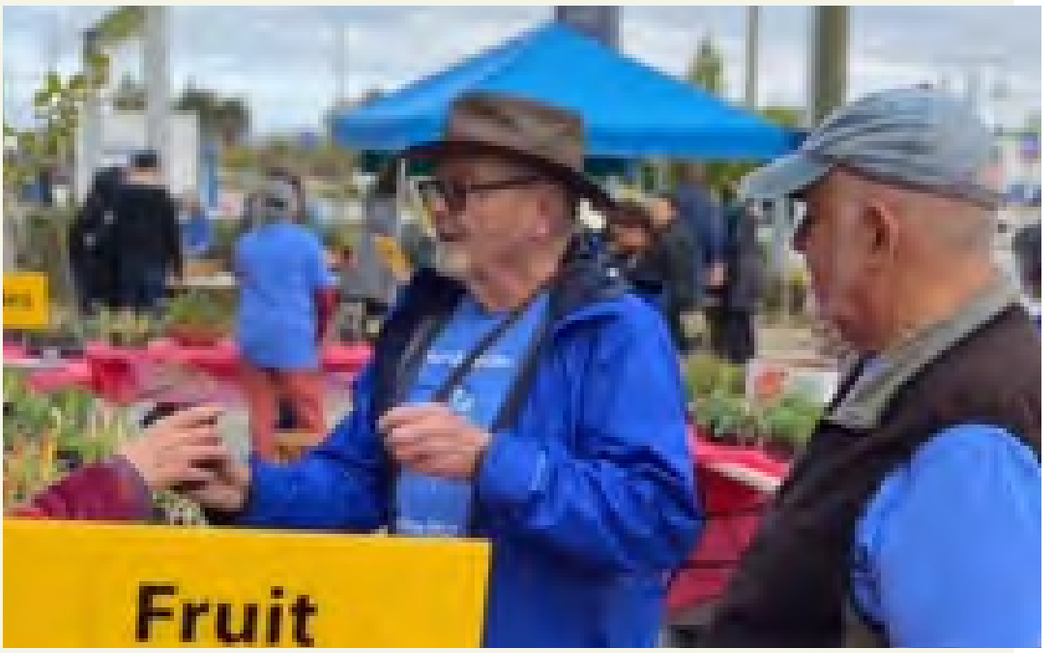
April 14-16
Bradner Flower Show 10am-4pm daily. Bradner Community Hall, Admission $2.50. More detail: Bradner Flower show

April 26
RGC Meeting with feature speaker T. Hobbs

May 6
Annual Plant Sale
Richmond Garden Club
South Arm United Church

Annual Plant Sale

The annual plant sale to be held Saturday, May 6th, 9 a.m. to 1p.m. in the parking lot of South Arm United Church, is a major fundraiser for the club. The planning for this event is well underway but additional volunteers will be needed to help work the sale tables, set-up, take-down, and of course to bring labeled healthy home-grown seedlings.
Members interested in participating in this project, contact Kate Herring c/o *richmondgardenclub@gmail.com.*



RGC Plant Sale 2022. Photo by Lynda Pasacreta

Photography Committee Update

Say Cheese!
Thanks kindly to four volunteers who answered our call for a Photography Committee. Fiona Czeschel, Visnja Gasparic Vojvodic, Thora Gislason, and Pat Macintosh have offered their time and skills to help us start to build a gorgeous local photo and video collection for our club operational use in newsletters, website and club materials. If you would like to get involved as a contributing photographer, contact Thora

Gislason c/o *richmondgardenclub@gmail.com*.

And smile if you see them taking photos at club events!

Other Volunteer Opportunities

Help! All hands are welcome in our club, no matter how much or how little experience you have, how shy or outgoing you are. Whether you are good at digging, weeding, planting, writing, photographing, or just being charming - if you are ready to have fun and pitch in somewhere, there is a place for you. It's a great way to get to know others in the club, learn a few new skills, and help keep our club vibrant. Here are a few options to consider.

Live the Dream – Become a Garden Writer!
Have you always wanted to be a writer? Be one for us! The RGC Newsletter would LOVE to hear about your gardening passions, research, reflections, inspirations, travels and adventures. It's a friendly and eager audience so don't be shy! Letters articles, poems - can be short and sweet. It feels good! Contact the Newsletter Team (Lynda Pasacreta or Lisa Colby) to discuss further at: *richmondgardenclub@gmail.com*, or *ljcolby@icloud.com*.

Raffle Table
Our raffle table committee is looking for additional hands with this very popular activity at our club meetings. Anyone who has a little extra time to help the current team, please reach out to Joyce Novick c/o *richmondgardenclub@gmail.com*.

Seeking volunteer 'Buddies' for new members
Our new members are really cool people. So are our long-time members. You really should meet each other! Soooo....

Remember what we said about being charming? If you would like to get to know some of the new members a little better, and you have been a member of the club for more than a year, consider volunteering as a 'welcome buddy' to be matched randomly with a new member in their first season.

The details would be up to you. Intended as a very unscripted, lighthearted, flexible, low time commitment arrangement, you would just agree to let us share your phone number with an interested new member. They would then be encouraged to call you and you two would take it from there. You would be a friendly member for them to call with any questions from time to time, someone to recognize and chat with at club events where you might introduce them to other club members and friends, welcome them into whatever projects you are working on, or just share garden tales over a cup of tea.

Members who have been with the club more than a year and are interested, please send a note to the Lynda Pasacreta c/o *richmondgardenclub@gmail.com.*

The Complete RGC Committees /Project List

Below is the complete list of projects and committees. We don't have the space to include detail for all of them in this issue, but will rotate the spotlight on them in successive newsletters so you learn of the great stuff they are doing. If any of these projects pique your interest and you might like to get involved - reach out to the lead contact listed below, to learn more c/o *richmondgardenclub@gmail.com*. Where you see 'vacant' there is something that needs help right away and you can contact Lynda Pasacreta for more information.

- Speakers Coordinator - Vidyut Aklujkar
- Paulik Park Committee - Jill Wright
- Parlour Show - Pat Walach
- Rooftop Garden - Ruth Henderson
- Annual Plant Sale - Kate Herring
- Communications - Gary Lake
- Members' Garden Tour Tea - Joyce Novick
- Advertising Sales - Vacant
- Meet and Greet - Vacant
- Photography Committee - Thora Gislason
- Raffle Prize Draw - Joyce Novick
- Steveston Boardwalk Planters - Karen Hakansson
- Richmond Hospital Thrift Store Planters - Kate Herring
- Refreshments - Maria Silva

Grow Your Garden Savvy

Forsythia in bloom

Garden Giggles
Why should you never iron a four-leaf clover?

Answer:
Because you don't want to press your luck!

(Source: thepioneerwoman.com)

March To-Do List

ASK THE GARDEN GURU

Have a gardening question? Many others probably have the same one – we guarantee. Send those questions in to our Garden Guru at richmondgardenclub.com and we will track down answers to publish in the newsletter each month, so we all learn together. (Watch out Master Gardeners and other local experts, we

Checklist for the March Gardener

Spring is officially here mid-month and we get to stop planning and start gardening! Here is a checklist of some of key things to get started on this March.

might be calling for help!)

Q: What is that arching yellow showstopper shrub covered in sunny yellow flowers right now?

A: That is Forsythia! (photo above), originating from East Asia, but now common throughout North America.

Mainly deciduous, but sometimes semi-evergreen, these shrubs dazzle with arching branches of profuse cheerful yellow flowers that emerge in early spring before the leaves.

The 4-petaled flowers are like narrow tubes that can be longer or shorter depending on the cultivar.

You can also force the blossoms for early colour indoors. Just set some cut branches into a vase of water in later winter or early spring and they should blossom within a week.

Forsythia are attractive to bees, birds and butterflies in the spring.

More reliable than watching the calendar, you can also know that when the Forsythia bloom each year, it's time to start planting peas and pruning your roses!

Depending on the cultivar they can range from dwarf size 4 ft. to 10 ft. tall, so plan your planting space accordingly. But other than an annual pruning, they don't require much maintenance. They bloom on old wood (last season's growth). So prune them after the flowering fades in the spring, not in winter or

Start your seedlings or divide perennials to pot up for the plant sale!

Not sure how? Here is a link to learn how to start seeds indoors:

- How to sow seeds indoors / RHS Gardening

And visit this On-line Learning page of our own RGC website, where you can find several How-To videos by fellow member expert gardeners, including:
"How to divide and propagate plants" with Gary Lake.

- Online learning - Richmond Garden Club

Tend your soil

Apply organic compost to the soil to improve soil structure and prevent moisture loss. Top dress containers.

- Aerate lawns;
- Remove and mulch weeds before they get out of hand.
- And while you are down there in the dirt - protect new spring growth from those slugs.

Pruning

- Deadhead early bloomers.
- When forsythia blooms, prune and fertilize the roses.
- Cut back Dogwood and Willow to promote more colourful winter stems next winter.

Planting

Lift and divide overgrown clumps of perennials and replant immediately.

- It's a good time to plant summer bulbs, new perennials, shrubs, hedges, vines and trees.
- Plant early peas, potatoes, lettuce, spinach and other annual greens outdoors spring or you will cut off all the flower buds that set the summer before.

This plant is a good alternative to the more invasive yellow flowering Scotch broom.

Sources:

Invasive Species Council of BC. Grow Me Instead.

Brickell, C., Cole, T., Zuk, J., (1997) Readers Digest A-Z Encyclopedia of Garden Plants.

Editors (2021) Forsythia: How to Grow and Care for Forsythia Bushes | The Old Farmer's Almanac .

We thank the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) website for some inspiration and some of the ideas above, and we also mixed in some other common local knowledge. For more details and ideas on things you can do this month, check out this RHS link: *Gardening in March - jobs to do this month / RHS Gardening*

Have fun out there!

Search Engine Tricks for Better Garden Research

By Thora Gislason

Do you get frustrated trying to find quality information on plants when perusing the internet? Oftentimes our searches bring up commercial sites and blog postings of questionable quality. Or, we just can't find exactly what we're looking for in the mass of "internet noise" out there. Enter the Google Programmable Search Engine!

Available to anyone with a Google account, this tool allows you to handpick your favourite sites and pop them into your own personal search engine. When you search within it, you're only searching those sites you have selected. Here is a "Plant Search" I set up using ten of the quality sites recommended during the Master Gardener training, most of which are specific to our region. The URL is here: *Programmable Search Engine (google.com)*

I used this search recently when I was trying to identify pale pink varieties of Japanese azaleas. A regular Google search just wasn't giving me the results I wanted! As with most searches, the more specific you can be, the better. When you open the link, you'll see a search box with the words "Enhanced by Google" in it - simply type your search terms there. Your results will open in a new tab. The first few hits you will see will be ads, unfortunately(!)

To set up your own Programmable Search Engine (I've also set them up for topics such as personal finance sites, veterinary sites, and BC Strata info),

- sign in to your Google account, or set one up if you don't have one. Then go to this page: *https://programmablesearchengine.google.com/about/*
- Click on "Get started," then "Add" and follow the steps given - it's very quick and easy!
- Once you have the URL for your search you can bookmark it or share it with others. I shortened my URL using the free tool at *bitly.com*.

Here are the ten sites I chose to include in the search engine (of course there are many others that could be added):

- www.bcinvasives.ca
- www.growgreenguide.ca [Metro Vancouver]
- www.ibis.geog.ubc.ca/biodiversity/eflora/ [E-Flora BC]
- www.garden.org/plants
- www.plantdatabase.kpu.ca
- www.greatplantpicks.org
- www.missouribotanicalgarden.org
- www.landscapeplants.oregonstate.edu
- www.pnwplants.wsu.edu [Pacific Northwest Plants Database System]
- www.urbanforestnursery.com

Happy searching!

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Green Inspirations

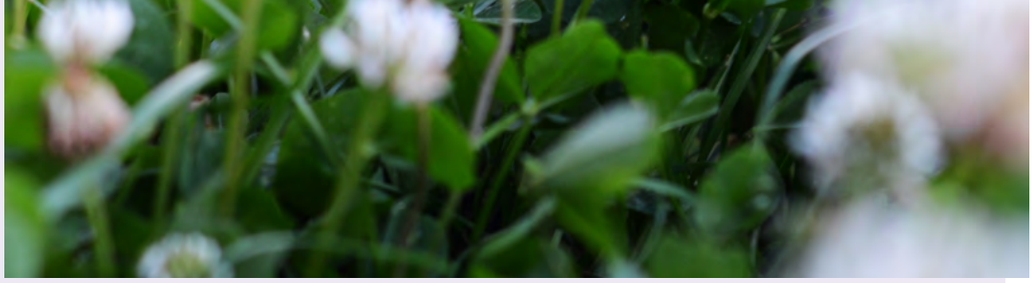
The Shamrock Redemption

By L. Colby

In the spirit of St. Patrick's Day, and as part of our ongoing interest in gardening towards a healthier planet, we shine a spotlight on the humble shamrock (clover).

Long ago, about 1700 years past, the shamrock, was adopted by the patron saint of Ireland (Saint Patrick), as a symbol of the holy trinity in his quest to convert the pagan Irish to Christianity. The three leaves represented the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. St. Patrick himself had a very colourful life-story worthy of Netflix and we have no time for it here. But suffice to say that as the years went on the details of St. Patrick's travails became fuzzy to the masses, yet the Shamrock continued to enjoy mythical glamour and fame. It became more generally celebrated as symbolic of Ireland and the rebirth of spring. And of, course there was the added magical aspect - that finding a 4-leaf clover against stiff 1 in 10,000 odds, would bring you good luck, and then you could double that luck if you shared the 4-leaf clover with another person. All quite nice indeed.

But then, about 50 years ago, the plot took a bit of a twist... at least in North America. Clover that had happily mingled in pastures and fields and lawns everywhere, started to develop a bad reputation. As a bit of a thug, dare we say; a useless weed to be banished. The old wisdom of adding clover to seed mixes due to its role in keeping the lawn healthy and improving the soil, was forgotten, as a new mania for sterile manicured lawns began to take over. And without the companion clover, and other compatible species, the lawns became less resilient, and their soils needed more fertilization, and the pollinators lost yet more of their early spring food source.



The story has a happy ending, though, as this humble plant is making a big comeback, starting to get some well-deserved respect again for its many hidden talents and its important role in our gardens and natural world.

Shamrock comes from the word 'Seamrog' that meant 'little clover' or 'young clover'. 'Clover' is from the Latin *clava which* means 'club', like on playing cards, in describing the three-leaflet form of its leaves.

In the Pea family (Fabaceae), there are about 270 species within this clover (*Trifolium)* genus, ranging from creeping to upright, annual, to biennial to herbaceous perennial, all commonly found in grassy meadows and pastures and roadsides. Native to Europe and Asia, clover was later introduced around the world. Sometimes confused with *wood sorrel (Oxalis),* the *Trifolium* clover leaf has three flat oval shaped lobes, whereas the three lobes of *Oxalis* leaves are more heart shaped and have a distinctive fold down the centre.

There is some debate amongst botanists as to which clover species might have been the original shamrock. Some insist it is the Small hop-clover (*Trifolium dubium*) with yellow pea-like flowers, while others say it is White or Dutch clover *(Trifolium repens)*, a perennial herb that has white or pinkish round, fragrant pea-like flowers. We may never know, but both have the shamrock's distinctive club-shaped leaves. They also have very tiny legume fruit pods less than a 1/4 inch long.

Other types of clover now commonly seen in Coastal BC in addition to the White clover (*T. repens*) and Small hop-clover (*T. dubium*) mentioned above, include:

- Red clover (*T. pratense*) with red flowering heads,
- Alsike clover (*T. hybridum*) with more upright stems and pink flowers.
- Springbank clover (*T.wormskjoldii*) is smaller with creeping rhizomes to 30 cm. long, its red-purple flowers sometimes tipped with white.
- Crimson clover (*T. incarnatum*) A very attractive annual form, tap- rooted, 20-60 cm tall with beautiful 8cm long crimson flower heads from April to June.

As legumes in the Pea family, clover is known to host nitrogen fixing bacteria in their roots. In this way, species such as clover, alfalfa and lupines actually *increase* soil fertility wherever they grow. Mixed with a lawn it eliminates the need to feed the lawn!

Clover is a beautiful and low maintenance ground cover, particularly suited to portions of lawn where traffic is light. It provides a beautiful green (or purple-leaved) carpet with dainty flowers. It is resilient and can thrive in both summer drought, and shade, staying verdant without irrigation in conditions where grass will struggle more.

The White clover, more typically recommended for lawn mixtures, leafs up early and is one of the first to flower in the spring, representing an important food source for bees, butterflies, and other insects (even earthworms like it).

Most clover are edible to humans too, though not always great tasting (maybe more of survival option than a preferred snack!). Springbank clover may be a tasty exception, however. The long fleshy white rhizomes of Springbank clover were an important food source to northwest coast peoples, including the Haida, Comox, and Straits Salish. Their flavour is apparently sweet, similar to young green peas. The rhizomes were dug in the fall, eaten raw or steamed in cooking pits, and were eaten dipped in fat or oolichan oil. The rhizomes were also dried for winter use.

Clover also has a history of herbal and medicinal uses. Red clover is known to make delicious tea and has been touted in traditional medicines as having anti-inflammatory properties and being helpful in the treating various ailments.

So with all those benefits, home gardeners are encouraged to find places again for trusty clover in your garden, as an easy-care way to slowly introduce into your garden more resilience to a changing climate, more biodiversity for a healthier ecosystem, and more naturally fertile soil.

Plant some clover in lawn borders or under shade trees, or evenly broadcast throughout the lawn as a blend. And if yours is a patio or balcony garden, some of these clovers can be lovely as surface cover (green mulch) backdrops to other feature plants in your containers. For something a little different for your container, check out the enchanting Bronze Dutch Clover (*T. repens* 'Atropurpureum').

Be part of the Shamrock redemption and sprinkle a little clover this spring!

(With thanks from the bees and the butterflies.)

Sources:

- Varner, C. The Flora and Fauna of Coastal BC and the Pacific Northwest. (2021) p. 211
- Pojar & MacKinnon, Plants of Coastal British Columbia (1994) p.196,197
- *Lewis, G., (2022) The Complete Book of Ground Covers*
- *www.almanac.com/clover-comeback*
- *Trifolium repens - Wikipedia*
- *St. Patrick's Day Facts: Shamrocks, Snakes, and a Saint (nationalgeographic.com)*
- Growing Clover in the Lawn | The Old Farmer's Almanac
- *white clover wikipedia - Search (bing.com)*